

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device of portable terminals for acquiring product data in a shopping centre, comprising:

- a plurality of cradles for a corresponding plurality of portable terminals adapted to be withdrawn and used by the customers of the shopping centre for product data acquisition;

- means for identifying each customer enabled to use the portable terminals;

- means for communicating to each identified customer, in response to said identifying means, a correspondent terminal to be withdrawn from the dispensing device for the product data acquisition;

- a data control and processing unit ~~adapted to control~~ for controlling the identifying means and the communicating means ~~and for processing the product data acquired through said terminals~~;

wherein said plurality of cradles, said identifying means, said ~~communication~~ communication-communicating means, and said control unit are housed in a single housing, and wherein ~~in that~~ said plurality of cradles is housed in a substantially flat portion of said housing, said substantially flat portion being provided in close proximity of the customer ~~identification~~ identifying means so as to allow access to said plurality of terminals.

2. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein said portion for housing said terminals is substantially horizontal.

3. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein said

portion for housing said terminals comprises a box-shaped body including a plurality of compartments constituting said plurality of terminal cradles.

4. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 3, wherein each compartment of said plurality of compartments is adapted to house a terminal of said plurality of terminals and comprises locking/unlocking means of the terminal housed therein.

5. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device according to claim 3, wherein said box-shaped body comprises first electrical connectors adapted to ~~co-operate~~ cooperate with second electrical connectors provided on the terminals.

6. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 3, wherein each compartment of said plurality of compartments comprises:

- a first upper aperture for inserting the terminal, wherein a vertical axis and a terminal insertion axis inclined by a predetermined angle with respect to the vertical axis are defined;
- a second lower service aperture below the first aperture;
- means for guiding the terminal into the compartment.

7. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 6, wherein said second aperture has a size larger than that of said first aperture.

8. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device according to claim 6, wherein each compartment of said plurality of compartments comprises a terminal support element arranged ~~outside~~ at least partially off a projection of the first aperture along the vertical axis.

9. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 8, wherein said terminal support element comprises opposed guiding walls inclined at said predetermined angle with respect to said vertical axis, and wherein one of said walls comprises a support step for contacting a lower end of the terminal, the support step being arranged outside the projection of the first aperture along the vertical axis.

10. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 6, wherein said box-shaped body comprises a covering surface provided with a plurality of holes at said first terminal insertion apertures.

11. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, further comprising means for moving the housing.

12. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according claim 1, wherein the customer identifying means comprises at least any one of the following means: a magnetic card reader, a smart card reader, a bar-code card reader, an optical receiver, a radio or mobile phone receiver, a fingerprint reader, a fingerprint or retina detector, a device for entering a numerical code, a voice detector.

13. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein the means for communicating to identified customers the terminals to be withdrawn comprises at least any one of the following means: visual communication means on a display or monitor, visual communication means in the proximity of each cradle of said plurality of cradles, sound or voice communication means, terminal lifting means provided into each cradle of said plurality of cradles.

14. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein the communicating means provides one of marketing information, promotional information

and a discount voucher.

15. (Currently Amended) A dispensing device according to claim 1, further comprising one of the following:

data transmission means to an optical-type terminal;

data transmission means to a radio-type terminal;

data transmission means from an optical-type terminal; and

data transmission means from a radio-type terminal~~/or reception means to and from optical and/or radio type terminals.~~

16. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein said housing comprises a charge/discharge circuit for batteries of the terminals.

17. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according claim 3, wherein each compartment comprises at least one sensor for indicating presence and/or correct arrangement of the terminal into the compartment.

18. (Previously Presented) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein said housing comprises means for printing one of ticket, marketing or promotional information and a discount voucher.

19. (Currently Amended) An integrated system for the automatic dispensing of portable terminals for acquiring product data in a shopping centre, comprising:

- at least one dispenser of portable terminals for acquiring product data in a shopping centre;
- a control station of said at least one terminal dispenser;
- a connection network between said at least one terminal dispenser and said control station so as to allow the exchange of information therebetween;

wherein said at least one dispenser comprises:

- a plurality of cradles for a corresponding plurality of portable terminals to be withdrawn and used by the customers of a shopping center for product data acquisition;

- means for identifying each customer enabled to use the portable terminals;

- means for communicating to each identified customer, in response to said identifying means, a correspondent terminal to be withdrawn from the dispensing device for the product data acquisition;

- a data control and processing unit for controlling the identifying means and the communicating means;

wherein said plurality of cradles, said identifying means, said communicating means and said control unit are housed in a single housing, and wherein said plurality of cradles is housed in a substantially flat portion of said housing, said substantially flat portion being provided in close proximity of the customer identifying means so as to allow access to said plurality of terminals.

20. (CANCELLED)

21. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 19, wherein said control station is in remote position with respect to said at least one terminal dispenser.

22. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 21, wherein said connection network is a wireless local network.

23. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 21, wherein said connection network is a geographic network.

24. (Previously Presented) An integrated system according to claim 19, further comprising

- means for downloading the product data acquired through the terminals;
- means for computing, as a function of the acquired data, an amount to be paid.

25. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein said means for downloading the product data acquired through the terminals are housed in the terminal dispenser.

26. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein said means for downloading the product data acquired through the terminals are provided in remote position with respect to the terminal dispenser.

27. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, further comprising at least one cash register for the payment of said amount.

28. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, further comprising means for charging an amount to be paid directly to a bank account of the customer.

29. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein at least a portion of the terminals used for acquiring the product data is dispensed to the customers for personal use.

30. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein at least a portion of the terminals used for acquiring the product data belongs to the customers.

31. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 29, wherein the terminal has means for allowing automatic identification of the customer.

32. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 24, wherein at least one of said

terminals exchanges information with the control station through a wireless connection network.

33. (Previously Presented) A system according to 24, wherein at least one of the terminals receives, either visually or voice, one of marketing information, promotional information, and a discount voucher.

34. (Previously Presented) A system according to claim 28, wherein said means for charging the amount to be paid is controlled by the terminal.

35. (Currently Amended) An integrated system for the sales of products in a shopping centre ~~through the use of a portable terminal belonging to the customer~~, comprising:

- portable terminals for acquiring product data;
- a dispensing device of said portable terminals;
- means for identifying the customer ~~through identification of the respective terminal belonging to the customer, said terminal being adapted to acquire product data;~~
- means for downloading the product data acquired through ~~the identified a~~ portable terminal dispensed to the identified customer;
- means for computing, as a function of the acquired product data, an amount to be paid;

wherein at least one of said portable terminals is a code reading device to be connected to a personal terminal belonging to the customer.

36. (Previously Presented) A dispenser of portable terminals, the portable terminals being used to acquire product data, the dispenser comprising:

- a dispenser housing;
- plural compartments in the housing for accommodating corresponding plural portable terminals;

means for identifying a customer entitled to withdraw and use one of the portable terminals;

means for communicating to the entitled customer which one of the plural portable terminals is allocated to the entitled customer for use in product data acquisition;

a data control and processing unit which controls the identifying means, the communicating means, and which processes the product data acquired through the product data acquisition;

wherein each compartment comprises:

an upper aperture for receiving a terminal inserted therein;

a compartment first wall inclined at a predetermined angle to a vertical axis

a support step provided on the compartment first wall for contacting a lower end of the terminal.

37. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, further comprising a compartment further wall which is opposed to the compartment first wall.

38. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein each compartment further has a lower service aperture situated beneath the upper aperture.

39. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein the support step has a first electrical connector thereon for mating with a second electrical connector on the terminal.

40. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, where each compartment has a sensor for detecting at least one of presence and correct orientation of the terminal in the compartment.

41. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein each compartment has means for selectively locking the terminal in the compartment.

42. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein each compartment has a terminal lifting mechanism for ~~selecting~~ selectively lifting the terminal allocated to the entitled customer relative to the compartment.

43. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein when contacting the support step, two-thirds of a longest aspect of the terminal along the predetermined angle extends out of the compartment.

(Please add new claims 44 - 46 as follows:)

44. (NEW) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein said data control and processing unit further processes the product data acquired through said terminals.

45. (NEW) A dispensing device according to claim 1, wherein at least one of said terminals is a code reading device to be connected to a personal terminal belonging to the customer.

46. (NEW) A system according to claim 24, wherein at least one of said terminals is a code reading device to be connected to a personal terminal belonging to the customer